



Questions & Answers

Arsenic in Drinking Water

Guidance for Group A Transient Non-Community (TNC) and Group B public drinking water systems

For many years, the drinking water standard for arsenic was 50 parts per billion (ppb). In January 2001, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lowered the standard to 10 ppb. Lowering the standard, or maximum contaminant level (MCL), will reduce health risks associated with long-term exposure to arsenic in drinking water. Arsenic is considered a contaminant that can impact health, including bladder, liver, or skin cancer. A person who consumes water containing arsenic in excess of the MCL over a lifetime (70 years) is most at risk.

The 10 ppb standard goes into effect in January 2006, but does not apply to all water systems in Washington. Group A community water systems (serve more than 25 people) and non-transient non-community (NTNC) water systems (such as schools and daycare centers) are required to meet the new standard by January 2006. This lower standard currently does NOT apply to Group A transient non-community (TNC) water systems (such as gas stations, restaurants, and highway rest areas) or Group B systems (serve fewer than 25 people).

Why aren't TNC water systems required to meet the 10 ppb standard?

The health risk caused by lifetime exposure to any contaminant depends on both the length of exposure and the level of the contaminant being consumed. TNC systems usually serve different people day-to-day. Because people do not typically drink water from a TNC system every day for many years, they are not likely to be exposed to arsenic long enough to incur significant health impacts. This is why TNC systems are not required to comply with the 10 ppb standard.

Why aren't Group B water systems regulated the same as Group A systems under the new arsenic MCL?

Unlike TNC systems, Group B systems typically do provide water to the same people on a day-to-basis, possibly for many years. Because of the higher health risk associated with drinking the water regularly, the Department of Health (DOH) supports the development of a state arsenic MCL for Group B water systems consistent with the federal MCL for Group A systems.

What is DOH doing for people who use private wells and springs with arsenic contamination?

Although DOH does not have regulatory authority over individual wells or springs serving a single family residence, DOH is concerned about possible health impacts to private homeowners using a water source with arsenic levels over the federal MCL. DOH is working with local



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health jurisdictions to develop and distribute information to individual households using their own water supply. The information will cover health effects and possible treatment (or other) options to reduce the level of arsenic.

What options do Group A TNC, Group B, and private household water systems have to reduce elevated arsenic levels?

One option is to find another source of water with a lower (preferably non-detectable) level of arsenic that you can use exclusively or can blend with your existing source to achieve a lower level. You may be able to connect to a nearby approved water system not containing elevated arsenic levels. Although treatment is an option, DOH strongly recommends you consult with your local health jurisdiction for advice and approval prior to installing treatment because arsenic treatment can be costly and time consuming.

Will DOH support the development and early adoption of arsenic regulation by local health jurisdictions?

DOH has already worked closely with Snohomish and Whatcom Counties to develop arsenic requirements for Group B and private household water systems. We will continue to assist local health jurisdictions as they respond to elevated levels of arsenic in drinking water, and support them in being consistent with direction from the State Board of Health.

For more Information

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) Web site:

<http://www.epa.gov/safewater/arsenic.html>

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) Web site:

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/arsenic/arsenic.html>

The Department of Health's Office of Drinking Water Web site:

http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw/our_main_pages/arsenic.htm

The Office of Drinking Water's Regional Offices:

Southwest Regional Office (Olympia):	360-664-0768
Northwest Regional Office (Kent):	253-395-6750
Eastern Regional Office (Spokane):	509-456-3115

